

## Transnational solidarity and cross-border practices in Europe

Ciornei, Irina

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**The Europeanisation of Everyday Life:  
Cross-Border Practices and Transnational Identifications  
Among EU and Third-Country Citizens**

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Transnational solidarity and cross-border practices  
in Europe

**Irina Ciornei**

(EUCROSS Final Report, pp. 114-126)

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The research consortium is formed by:

- Università 'G. d'Annunzio' di Chieti-Pescara, Italy (coordinator: Ettore Recchi);
- GESIS–Leibniz Institut für Sozialwissenschaften, Mannheim, Germany (coordinator: Michael Braun);
- Aarhus Universitet, Denmark (coordinator: Adrian Favell);
- IBEI–Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals, Spain (coordinator: Juan Díez Medrano);
- University of York, United Kingdom (coordinators: Mike Savage, Laurie Hanquinet);
- Universitatea din Bucuresti, Romania (coordinator: Dumitru Sandu).

EUCROSS scientific coordinator: Ettore Recchi. EUCROSS project manager: Matteo Abbate.

For additional information: [www.eucross.eu](http://www.eucross.eu).

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## **Transnational solidarity and cross-border practices in Europe<sup>23</sup>**

This chapter focuses on the factors that promote the support for European social solidarity among European citizens – a key dimension of the sense of belonging to Europe as operationalized in the EUCROSS project. Given the context of the recent economic crisis, transnational social solidarity is understood as support for Eurobonds and other mechanisms that have been presented by national and EU political actors as solutions to the economic difficulties some of the EU countries faced during the 2008-2013 period. Drawing on theoretical and empirical perspectives on national social solidarity, the chapter deduces a set of explanations that can be applicable to understanding solidarity EU context.

While there is extensive research on both theoretical and empirical underpinnings of social solidarity in the context of national states, there is a shortage of studies in what regards social solidarity in a transnational polity such as the EU (but see Ross and Borgmann-Prebil 2010). Normative reflections on the future of the EU warn that there is a European crisis of solidarity. This crisis is generated mainly by the ambiguity of the concept of European ‘peoplehood’ and feelings of loss of national identity and economic insecurity (Borgmann-Prebil and Ross 2010; Delanty 2008). Based on the EUCROSS survey data with nationals of the six countries selected, the main findings of this chapter show that identification with Europe and transnational friendships are significant predictors of European solidarity. With the exception of returnees, when compared to locals, the other patterns of cross-border mobility presented in Chapter 1 have no role in explaining the endorsement of transnational forms of solidarity.

### **National and transnational solidarity**

Social solidarity entails networks of relationships that presuppose dependency, reciprocity and responsibility among the members of a group or a political community. Regarded either as the essential characteristic of societies by Durkheim (Evans 1977; von Oorschot and Komter 1998) or as a special type of social relationship by Weber (Stjerno 2005), in essence, social solidarity refers to group loyalty and sharing of resources in a political community. Historically, national governments are the repository of the institutions of solidarity in a society. Their role is to define the networks of mutual support and to delimitate the groups among which economic and social hazards are distributed (de Deken et al 2006: 142). Consequently, social solidarity has a component of ‘top-down’ enforcement of obligations and responsibilities and a horizontal dimension through which individual members legitimize these rules (Parsons 1967). Without individual approval, formal rules of social solidarity face the danger of ‘free-riding’ and non-compliance. But what motivates individual members of a political community to support relationships of responsibility, interdependence and reciprocity among each other?

In the context of national societies, ‘categorical identities’ such as ‘nation’ or ‘community’ sustain social solidarity among the members of a political community (Calhoun 2002). However, these categorical identities do not rise in a vacuum. Social interactions and

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exchanges with other group members are likely to bring awareness of the existence of other similar individuals with shared interests and destiny. Following this argumentative line, the subsequent analysis explores the extent to which identification with Europe and cross-border interactions foster a conception of transnational solidarity among individuals.

## **Hypotheses**

### *Shared identity and European solidarity*

National identity posits individuals as 'equivalent to each other' and justifies both the bottom-up and top-down enforcement of solidarity on the basis of the sharing of a common identity/similarity. In this situation, the individual shares a set of cultural elements with the other members of the group/political community and this common identification and recognition is what constitutes the basis for solidarity among members. It is no surprise that following this line of reasoning the connection between identity and solidarity has been mainly negative in the context of the European polity. Since identification with Europe is weak and non-salient, the argument goes, few solidarity ties can arise between still nationally rooted European citizens (Delanty 2008). As a solution to this malaise, theorists such as Ross (2010) call for a reconceptualization of transnational solidarity that bypasses the essentialist, nationally bounded conceptions of solidarity. Habermas (1996) and Calhoun (2002) situate the possibility of European solidarity through engagement in a Europe-wide public sphere in which citizens become aware of the perspectives of all others.

Yet, not all is lost when associating identification and solidarity in a transnational setting. The few empirical studies that make a connection between solidarity at the transnational level and European identification do show a positive correlation between the two concepts. Mau (2005) demonstrates that individuals who also embrace a European form of identification, as opposed to those who identify exclusively with their national community are also more prone to support redistributive policies at the European level. Since European identification is a significant predictor for European solidarity understood as transnational redistributive arrangements, it is relevant to test if identification with Europe also drives financial solidarity in the context of economic crisis. The first hypothesis proposed is that

*H1. Individuals who display a stronger degree of identification with Europe are more likely to support financial solidarity arrangements at the EU level.*

Still, the connection between (European) identity and solidarity cannot be properly understood without taking into account the role of social interactions. Social interactions among individuals create feelings of identity which, in turn, spill-over into solidarity among group members (Stjerno 2005). As Recchi (2012) argues, involvement in space-situated associative relations make possible the consciousness of we-ness, of a shared identity which then spills over in support for social solidarity.

Related to this, a separate line of inquiry does not consider identity as an intermediary category between social interaction and solidarity. Through interaction with others, previously strangers, the individual becomes sensitive to their concrete 'pain' and 'needs'

and expands her repertoire of solidarity (Rorty 1989). In this situation, interaction among individuals has a direct positive effect on the formation of solidarity ties. Drawing on previous research that shows a positive association between social interactions, cross-border mobility and European identification (Recchi and Favell 2009; Kuhn 2011), this chapter investigates the implications of intra-EU mobility for the endorsement of a transnational conception of social solidarity. It is expected that

*H2. Individuals with a larger array of cross-border practices and connections are more prone to support a European conception of social solidarity.*

More specifically, transnational friendships and cross-border mobility practices, such as travelling or residing in other EU countries, are factors that can enable the formation of the 'we-ness'. This, in turn may spill-over into a conception of solidarity at the transnational level. The analysis tests if these practices have a direct impact on solidarity or if they actually contribute to the embracement of a supranational identity which in turn has a positive effect on solidarity at the level of the EU. Two derived hypotheses are the following:

*H2a. A larger community of European friends increases individual support for transnational forms of solidarity.* Since transnational friendships are relevant not only in terms of numbers, but also in terms of diversity of nationalities, it is expected that both large numbers and nationally diverse friendships to have a positive impact on transnational solidarity.

*H2b. A larger degree of cross-border practices is positively associated with the support for a supranational conception of solidarity.* Following the analysis in Chapter 1 it is expected that more enduring patterns of cross-border interactions such as transnationals, visitors and returnees to be positively related to the endorsement of transnational forms of solidarity.

### **Operationalisation**

The following analysis is based on the survey samples with national respondents in the six countries selected. Question 3.15 of the EUCROSS survey is relevant for constructing the dependent variable:

*'The EU member states are currently pooling national state funds to help EU countries having difficulties in paying their debts. On a scale from one to five, where one means "strongly disagree" and five means "strongly agree": Please tell me how much you agree with this measure?'*

Given that the variable is measured on a 1-5 scale, the analysis is based on a set of ordinal logistic regressions with robust standard errors clustered per country of residence. In order to better understand the meaning of solidarity, the chapter also uses excerpts from the EUMEAN interviews. The answers have been coded with the Atlas.ti7 software and refer to the following question of the qualitative survey:

*"Do you think members states showed solidarity during the economic crisis?"*

Regarding the independent variables, the survey offers a rich conceptualization of concepts such as European identity (H1), cross-border mobility and social interaction (H2). In relation to European identity, I test separately various measurements such as:

- a. *On a scale from one to five, where one means “strongly disagree” and five means “strongly agree”, please tell me how much you agree with the following statements? “I feel European.”*
- b. *Do you consider yourself as being...CoR only/CoR and European/European and CoR/Only European/None of the above.*
- c. *If you were told tomorrow that the European Union had been dissolved, would you be sorry about it, indifferent or relieved? , where those who responded “sorry” received a one and the rest zero.*

In the analysis I use the second measurement, as it is what gives a better fit of the model.

The community of transnational friendships is measured both as numbers and diversity. I therefore test the significance of two variables. One refers to how many foreign born friends who live in another EU country the respondent has (none, some, a lot). The second one is related to the number of countries of residence of these friends (none, one, at least two). As the first measurement is not significant, the regression analyses shown below use the second measurement.

Cross-border interactions are operationalized following the methodology described in Chapter 1. The analysis tests the role of the six patterns of cross-border mobilities in the support for a European form of social solidarity: transnationals, virtual transnationals, visitors, tourists, returnees and locals.

The analysis controls for respondent's level of education, age, gender, occupation (operationalized on a four point nominal scale such as managers, professionals, skilled workers and unskilled workers) and ideological positioning on the left-right scale. It is expected that higher levels of education and occupational status to be positively correlated with support for European solidarity. As well, a placement on the right on the ideological scale is connected to support for anti-immigration and anti-EU parties in several EU countries (Hooghe, Marks and Wilson 2002). Placement on the right has, in consequence, a negative impact on attitudes regarding solidarity at the EU level.

### **European solidarity in the EUCROSS and EUMEAN surveys**

The distribution of respondents' preferences regarding European solidarity is influenced by their national context. As table 1 shows, on the overall, roughly 50 per cent endorse institutional arrangements for financial risk sharing. However, Danish and German respondents tend to adopt a neutral (3) position while almost two thirds of Spaniards and Italians declare to agree and strongly agree. Romanians place themselves nearer Southern European opinions, while only a minority of British respondents agree with transnational financial redistribution. Although clear differences between countries can be observed, the relationship between the context of residence and preferences on transnational solidarity is weak (Cramer's  $V < 0.20$ ). This suggests that besides nationality,

other factors play a more important role in explaining the diversity of opinions of EUCROSS respondents.

**Table 1 Percentages of answers on a 1-5 scale, where 1 is strong disagreement and 5 is total agreement with financial redistribution at the EU level**

	(1) strongly disagree	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5) strongly agree	(8) [Don't know]	(9) [Answer refused]	Total
Germany	16.1	16.6	33.3	17	14.1	1.8	1.2	100
Denmark	10.3	12.5	31.7	24.4	15.8	5.1	0.3	100
UK	17.7	10.5	30.4	19.9	16.4	4.5	0.7	100
Italy	5.7	3.9	18.3	18.6	50.9	2.2	0.4	100
Romania	12.6	11.2	20.1	11.1	40.1	4.8	0.1	100
Spain	4.5	3.1	15.1	23.4	49.7	3.5	0.7	100
Total	11.1	9.6	24.8	19.1	31.1	3.7	0.6	100

Pearson  $\chi^2(30) = 997.7703$  Pr = 0.000 Cramer's V = 0.1821

In what regards the meanings attached to European solidarity, the respondents have distinct understandings. The interviews from the qualitative EUMEAN survey are illustrative of the diversity of opinions. As an overall observation, German and Italian respondents tend to interpret solidarity as an individual act, while Spanish and Romanian interviewees speak more often about solidarity among nation-states. It is worth noting, though, that regardless of the meaning, the majority of respondents agree on the fact that neither citizens nor governments showed enough solidarity during the economic crisis.

One understanding of solidarity endorsed by respondents refers to solidarity among individuals. An act of solidarity is perceived as the direct financial help to troubled individuals from other countries. But, in most of the cases the interviewees refuse to engage in such practices.

*“Well, I can only say that for me. I mean I am not really solidary, because if I was solidary, I would have to grab some Greek or something like that, who is retiring and has no money and I would have to transfer some money to his bank account, so that he would be able to make ends meet. That would be actual solidarity, as an individual. I don’t do that, you know. I’m not planning on it either. So in this sense I’m not solidary at that point, but I understand the people, that they complain.”*  
(DE3, man, 46 years old)

A second interpretation refers to solidarity among governments/states. For example, some interviewees propose to increase intra-EU labour mobility to help out fellow union-members in need.

*“Perhaps there should be, for example, still more signals from the other countries, in which things are working out, such as Germany and Poland, which economically are faring well, to the outside that they are ready to accept workers. That is to accept them voluntarily.”* (DE7, woman, 34 years old)



Solidarity among EU governments also have negative connotation among the EUMEDAN respondents. Most of the Spanish, Italian and migrant interviewees think that it has been only a façade, a political measure that does not refer to real solidarity but obscure hidden motives.

*“Come on!! Everybody turned their backs on everybody inside the European Union. They gave money; they’ve done certain things to help certain states, yes! I agree, but they didn’t help because they wanted those countries to survive or go through the crisis. They helped because they were afraid for themselves, their chairs, their countries. There is no cohesion strong enough inside the European Union that would create a strong European feeling.” (RO44, man, 42 years old)*

*“Q: In general, would you say that the States and the people of the European countries have shown solidarity as expected in the face of this crisis?”*

*I think it is very easy to be in solidarity when things are good. But when things are complicated, it affects you, and you shut off into your own world, I think.” (ES6, woman, 40 years old)*

British and German respondents have more moderate opinions regarding the allegedly secret motives behind manifestations of financial solidarity among member states. These respondents are of the opinion that solidarity at the supranational level only became more manifest only after the national governments took the necessary measures.

*“Q: And how do you feel about that, for instance, Britain and countries helping the other countries who are perhaps in deeper crisis in Europe?”*

*A: That’s fine so long as that country is doing as much as it can do initially to help themselves. So long they are doing the max to help themselves, so long as they are not expecting us to give them, you know, millions of pounds and yet they’re letting their own people pay a very low rate of tax, or whatever it might be, I don’t know how it works. So long as they are helping themselves to the max then I don’t mind.” (UK9, woman, 56 years old)*

### **European solidarity, identity and cross-border practices**

This section discusses the relation between transnational solidarity, identification, and cross-border practices. As already anticipated in the theoretical section, ‘national identities’ are the cement of social solidarity in the context of modern nation states. Can identification with Europe play a similar role, in spite of its weak and non-salient character? The significance tests indicate that there is a very weak but significant correlation between attitudes towards European solidarity and identification with Europe (table 2). Individuals who claim to have some sort of European identity are more likely to agree with common policies of financial risk sharing. The respondents who feel strongly European are the group with the lowest proportion among those against transnational financial redistribution policies, albeit they are also the most numerous among the ‘neutrals’.

**Table 2 Preferences of European solidarity and identification with Europe (results in percentages)**

Solidarity	Only national	National and European	European and National	Strongly European
1	18.97	8.64	6.88	7.45
2	12.28	9.22	9.40	5.88
3	26.49	25.33	24.50	32.16
4	16.26	22.03	22.15	14.51
5	26.00	34.78	37.08	40.00
<b>Total</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(12)=2044615$  Pr=0.000 Cramér's V= 0.1089

Tables 3 and 4 show a similar perspective in what concerns transnational friendships. The larger the number of foreign friends, the greater the probability of supporting European solidarity. The difference between the various groups of transnational friendships is even more visible when we take into account the range of European nationalities that constitute them. Thus, the larger the number of countries these friends live in, the greater the support for transnational solidarity. This finding corroborates previous arguments related to the role of 'human interaction' as a basis of social solidarity.

**Table 3 Preferences of European solidarity and number of friends in other EU countries (results in percentages)**

Solidarity	A lot	Some	None
1	13.00	8.74	12.03
2	7.33	6.88	10.61
3	21.33	27.33	24.97
4	21.67	23.09	18.63
5	36.67	33.96	33.76
<b>Total</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(8) = 32.7763$  Pr = 0.000 Cramér's V = 0.0689

**Table 4 Preferences of European solidarity and range of friendships in other EU countries (results in percentages)**

Solidarity	No foreign country	One country	Several countries	Total
1	12.09	10.14	8.13	11.65
2	10.65	7.57	6.02	10.05
3	25.77	27.38	25.30	25.91
4	19.82	21.26	18.37	19.90
5	31.67	33.66	42.17	32.49
<b>Total</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(8)=288.354$  Pr=0.000 Cramér's V=0.0501

The relation between European solidarity and patterns of cross-border practices displays a complex outlook (table 5). The fine-grained LCA analysis shows that the cleavage in terms of attitudes towards European solidarity is not between locals and transnationals. Still the results make sense: the least likely from showing solidarity with other Europeans are the tourists, even more so than locals. Tourists are characterized by non-committed, consumption-oriented mobility experiences. This observation confirms previous theoretical arguments according to which visiting foreign places and enjoyment of travel do not necessarily lead to the formation of self-aware cosmopolitans (Calhoun 2002). In a similar vein, this analysis shows that cross-border interactions in the form of tourism does not bring about a moral responsibility towards the other Europeans. As in the case of those who feel strongly European, transnationals are the group with the lowest proportion among those who clearly oppose transnational solidarity. Nonetheless, they are also quite numerous among the neutrals.

**Table 5 Preferences of European solidarity and transnational behaviour (results in percentages)**

<b>Solidarity</b>	<b>Trans-nationals</b>	<b>Virtual transnationals</b>	<b>Visitors</b>	<b>Tourists</b>	<b>Returnees</b>	<b>Locals</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>1</b>	8.09	10.63	10.72	11.93	11.37	12.46	11.51
<b>2</b>	8.38	9.33	9.60	12.79	7.80	9.65	10.10
<b>3</b>	26.88	21.69	29.12	27.67	26.09	24.31	26.01
<b>4</b>	24.57	18.22	21.92	22.75	17.17	17.46	19.88
<b>5</b>	32.08	40.13	28.64	24.85	37.57	36.11	32.48
<b>Total</b>	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00

Pearson  $\chi^2(20)=1050689$  Pr=0.000 Cramér's V=0.0689

### **A statistical assessment of European solidarity**

The previous analysis shows that European identity and diverse transnational friendships are positively associated with transnational solidarity, while the role of cross-border mobility is not straightforward. However, these associations may be actually determined by respondent's national context and individual characteristics such as ideology, level of education, occupation, income, age and gender. Moreover, as it has already been argued in the theoretical section, transnational friendships and patterns of cross-border mobility may be indirectly correlated to social solidarity. They are significant for the formation of European identification, which, in turn, positively influences the endorsement of transnational forms of solidarity. Table 6 presents the regression results of two models seeking to solve these questions. More specifically, Model 1 tests the significance of European identity, patterns of cross-border mobility and range of transnational friendships by controlling for individuals' ideology, socio-economic status and country of residence. Models 2 examines the significance of cross-border mobility patterns and range of transnational friendships without controlling for identification.

**Table 6 European solidarity: ordered logistic regressions with robust standard errors**

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef/se		Coef/se	
<i>European identity (base Only national)</i>				
National and European	0.41***	0.11		
National and European	0.53***	0.14		
Strongly EUR	0.34	0.30		
<i>Number of European friends CoR (Base none)</i>				
One country	-0.00	0.09	0.00	0.09
Several countries	0.22*	0.09	0.25**	0.09
	Model 1		Model 2	
<i>Patterns of cross-border mobility (base Locals)</i>				
Virtual transnationals	-0.08	0.10	-0.07	0.09
Tourists	-0.09	0.05	-0.07	0.04
Transnationals	-0.03	0.07	0.04	0.08
Visitors	-0.12	0.07	-0.07	0.07
Returnees	0.07+	0.03	0.09*	0.03
<i>Ideology and SES</i>				
<i>Ideology (base left)</i>				
Centre	-0.27*	0.12	-0.27*	0.13
-				
Right	0.42***	0.12	-0.44**	0.14
No ideology	-0.21	0.21	-0.25	0.22
<i>Education (base Less than high-school)</i>				
Secondary education	0.12	0.09	0.14	0.08
Tertiary education	0.19*	0.08	0.21*	0.09
<i>Occupation (base workers)</i>				
Managers	0.05	0.12	0.06	0.13
Professionals	0.14	0.10	0.16	0.10
Technicians and associate professionals	-0.09	0.06	-0.09	0.06
<i>Socioeconomic status (base Very difficult situation)</i>				
Difficult financial situation	0.24**	0.08	0.26***	0.07
Make ends meet	-0.09	0.16	-0.06	0.16
Comfortable financial situation	0.16	0.09	0.21*	0.08
Very comfortable financial situation	0.16	0.11	0.21	0.11
Age	-0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Female	0.03	0.09	0.01	0.09

	Model 1		Model 2	
	Coef/se		Coef/se	
<i>Country of residence (base Germany)</i>				
Denmark	0.43***	0.05	0.35***	0.03
UK	0.35***	0.06	0.20***	0.02
Italy	1.69***	0.16	1.70***	0.17
Romania	1.01***	0.15	0.97***	0.16
Spain	1.73***	0.14	1.73***	0.14
R-squared				
N. of cases	5434		5434	
+p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001				

Identification with the EU is a significant predictor for the support of a European conception of solidarity, confirming hypothesis one (Model 1). Thus, in relation to national citizens those who claim to identify with Europe (in combination with national identification) are more likely to endorse a transnational conception of solidarity. After computing predicted probabilities the results look as follows: the probability of scoring 1 on the 1-5 solidarity scale decreases from 0.12 to 0.108 when European identification changes from only national to European and national and all other variables are kept at their means. The probability of scoring 5 on the 1-5 solidarity scale increases from 0.24 to 0.31 when identification with Europe changes from 1 to 3 and all other variables are kept at their means.

Regarding H2a, social contacts in other EU countries affect positively support for European solidarity. As models 1-2 show, having friends in at least two European countries is a relevant predictor even after controlling for respondent's degree of identification with the EU. Given that the coefficients of the variables decrease from Model 3 to Model 2, the effect of transnational friendships on solidarity is both direct and indirect, mediated by respondent's level of identification. However, as Model 1 indicates, only a diverse community of foreign friends, spread in at least two countries, has a direct effect on the support for a European conception of solidarity.

The various patterns of cross-border practices do not have a direct effect on solidarity, except for returnees. As previously discussed in this report, cross-border mobility inside the EU has a positive role in fostering identification with Europe, but it does not affect directly respondent's support for transnational solidarity. In other words, physical mobility inside the EU does have a role for the support of transnational forms of solidarity, provided that it has a positive effect on the formation of a European identity. In this sense, H2b is confirmed only in the limited case of returnees.

Respondent's ideology plays a significant role in the formation of attitudes towards European solidarity independently of European identification. Placement on the right of the ideological scale is associated with a negative conception on European solidarity. This may be explained by the fact that far-right parties tend to have an anti-European

discourse, especially in terms of redistribution at the European level or toward foreign-born residents and therefore offer negative cues to their voters.

More educated Europeans also tend to be more solidary, even when controlling for the effect of identification, while occupation does not seem to make a difference. Income is significant only when comparing respondents with a difficult financial situation with those with a very difficult financial position. Gender and age do not stratify the preferences in terms of European solidarity.

The results also show that in comparison to German respondents, all the others tend to support European solidarity to a larger extent. Nonetheless, there are clear differences between Nordic and Mediterranean respondents.

### **Concluding remarks**

Transnational solidarity is a concept of reference in European treaties and policy documents. Yet, the understanding of present-day solidarities is still anchored in nationally-bounded societies both in the public and academic discourse (Borgmann-Prebil and Ross 2010). It is for this reason that social sciences are equipped with few theoretical and empirical lenses in order to understand the phenomenon beyond the borders of the national states. Normative and legal scholars made important advances in meaningfully theorizing solidarity in the modern EU context (Ross and Borgmann-Prebil 2010; Calhoun 2002; Habermas 1996; Delanty 2010). Complementary to these works, this paper offers a first cut into explaining individual support for financial solidarity in the context of the EU.

The previous findings show that in spite of being a weak and non-salient type of identity (Diez-Medrano 2010), identification with Europe matters for fostering attitudes of solidarity among European citizens. However, it is not only the abstract forms of identification what make people endorse a European form of solidarity, but also emotional attachment constructed through social interactions. The argument is supported by the significance of transnational friendships. The more diverse is the spectrum of European friends, that is, the larger the number of countries they come from, the greater the propensity to support transnational forms of solidarity. These findings point to classical sociological and philosophical ideas about solidarity. As Weber (1922/1978) has already argued decades ago, it is through social interactions and emotional ties at the micro-level that people become to embrace attitudes of solidarity. Or, in more recent postmodern language, Rorty (1989) argues that is the 'sensitivity' to others what makes people's sense of solidarity grow.

Among the various forms of cross-border mobilities, returnees seem to develop a moral outlook in what regards the European communities. This finding suggests that it is not necessarily the frequency or intensity of physical border-crossing to determine a conception of transnational solidarity, but an enduring, long-term and emotional immersion in another society. In this regards the formation of responsibility bonds among Europeans is a slow and long-term process which does not immediately follow to the removal of border controls.

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